

Esteemed Members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Joyce Lewis, Vice President of Key Human Services, a private non profit providing an array of services to individuals with disabilities or developmental delays since 1989. Today, I am speaking regarding Bill 5448 on the administration of the DDS system; specifically the Birth to Three system, Sec 6.

I would like to thank you all for your support of Birth to Three throughout the years and especially this year. It is a clear statement of your commitment to the wellbeing and success of Connecticut's young children and their families. Thank you in advance for your support of the annualized 9 million dollar increase targeted for past growth in the program.

The recent change in parent cost participation fees is outlined in this bill. Families are now expected to pay 60% more in fees. Not only is this a draconian change in these very demanding fiscal times, but it is in conflict with both the mission of Birth to Three and the priority expressed in An Act Concerning Children in the Recession. Birth to Three's mission guarantees equal access to services for all children in Connecticut. As you will see, many families can no longer afford to access Birth to Three services. The Children in the Recession Initiative prioritizes meeting primary needs or circumstances that

compromise health or future opportunities. Birth to Three services meet both of these criteria.

This 60% increase is forcing children with significant developmental delays out of the Birth to Three program. Our program has lost 7% of our children due to the increase. The impact of this withdrawal will be felt by these children and families as well as the local school systems for years to come.

Another cohort is the children that are eligible for Birth to Three services that are not choosing to receive services at all; no services, or in many cases not even an evaluation. We have had 20% of families not proceed to services from an eligible evaluation. How will their development progress? How about the children who are not even being evaluated due to the cost of services?

Many families are choosing to remain in the system receiving only service coordination at no cost. Service Coordination has increased from 170 to 229 families in January. In our program, service coordination only has increased fourfold. Unfortunately, these children's needs merit direct services and full participation in services and supports. Deplorably, these services have been priced out of the families' reach, increasing by up to \$114 per month and capping at \$272 per month. The median income in Connecticut is \$93,000 annually. For a family in this income bracket, family cost participation increased from \$65/month to \$104/month. This is a

dramatic increase in an ongoing household expense at a time when every dollar is already stretched to its' very limits.

These are just a microcosm of the impact of the recession on children with developmental delays and their families. While Bill 5360 was not widely supported logistically; testimonies reflected agreement with the broad goals and concerns behind the bill. Birth to Three services have proven efficacy. As many as 65% of children who receive Birth to Three do not require special education services at age 5. Services are cost effective; annual costs average \$8356 per child in Birth to Three compared to \$10,000-\$15,000 per child annually in local education costs. The integration of these two statistics powerfully demonstrates the value of Birth to Three. Therefore, it is clear that full participation in services for all eligible children is a critical priority for Connecticut's future.

Please reconsider this increase in parent fees and amend it in this bill. The impact has already been dramatic with many more futures on the brink.

Birth to Three can maximize revenue through centralizing insurance billing. Centralizing insurance billing utilizing a contractor would guarantee expertise and increase collection revenue. This option is preferable to removing the 10% retention of insurance collection (currently retained by the providers) while expecting increased collection.

Thank you for your attention to the needs of our children and families. Please contact me to discuss this at 860 409 7350 x 133. I appreciate your ongoing support and commitment to Birth to Three.